



GENEVA CENTRE FOR THE DEMOCRATIC CONTROL OF
ARMED FORCES (DCAF)

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RENAISSANCE OF AN OLD ISSUE?**

Karl W. Haltiner

*Swiss Federal Institute of
Technology, Zurich, Switzerland*

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DEMOCRATIC CONTROL OF ARMED FORCES: RENAISSANCE OF AN OLD ISSUE?¹

Karl W. Haltiner

There are at least four good reasons for predicting a growing relevance of the issue of democratic control of armed forces in the near future:

1. Post-Cold War Transfer Experiences

After the Cold War the democratization of Eastern European countries under communist rule demanded an institutional revision of the political control of the formerly party-dominated armed forces. The fundamental transformation of the role of these countries in the international system after the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact coincided with a substantial systemic change in their civic culture. In order to establish democratic control of the armed forces, models and principles in democratic force management were needed. Mainly NATO-members, especially the USA, projected their force control ideals and experiences to the region of the former Warsaw Pact countries. By doing so, they not only intended to help consolidate democracy but also lessened the potential risk of their own destabilization from outside. It was the Western European Union and the Partnership for Peace Programme that became the most important institutional framework for promoting principles of democratic force control and defence management.

Ten years of transfer experience suggest that:²

¹ Paper presented at the 4th International Security Symposium Special ERGOMAS Programme held November 14-19, in Geneva, Switzerland.

² See among others Joo Rudolf, *The Democratic Control of Armed Forces*, Chaillot Papers No. 23, February 1995, edited by the Western Unions Institute for Security Studies, pp. 56.

- the establishment of democratic control cannot be considered simply as an event but must be seen as a process. This process has not ended yet.
- expertise on democratic control cannot be based on abstract ideals and guidelines only but must suit the historic and sociological realities and the specific political and military culture of the individual countries.
- democratic control cannot be limited to legal and constitutional settlements but must be seen as a comprehensive transformation of political and military culture.
- in addition to the promotion of constitutional principles and theoretical models, more attention must be paid to the specific kinds of interrelations between political powers (executive, legislative and juridical), military administration (MOD), political parties, public opinion and media structure on the one hand and the armed forces on the other hand.
- it is not sufficient to focus on the mutual relationship between the civilian and the military side only. The process also includes the reshaping of the armed forces with regard to the basic command and management principles as well as the basics of military socialization and the officer selection and formation (human and civic rights in the forces). In other words, democratic control of forces refers to military-internal aspects as well as to military-external ones.

2. Self-Reflection and New Theories as a Reaction to the Post-cold War Transfer Experiences

Arising questions about the possibility of a transfer of institutional models of democratic control - such as for example the model of separation of powers and military professionalism (USA), of civic education and inner leadership of the Bundeswehr or the Swiss militia army model - intensified at the same time the self-reflection on the institutional prerequisites of these models in their respective countries of origin.

Evidently, the latter themselves had to become aware again of the normative and institutional rules and terminology before clearing them for transfer.³ In the course of this process, it became obvious obvious in the scientific debate. It reflects the US-American democratic political system with its inherent division of labour between the state's powers and its checks and balances. However, it can be doubted that the separation model which is marked by anglo-saxon political tradition fits the complex reality of the many different political and democratic cultures in Europe. It can be presumed that the various types of historically developed democratic systems in Europe have lead to various ways of democratic control of armed forces. A presidential system may that in Western Europe, other than in the United States where Huntington and Janowitz have defined the landmarks of scientific debate on civilmilitary relations within the so called separation model to the present day, comparative research is lacking.⁴ According mainly to Huntington, only a clear-cut civil-military separation allows the subordination of the military under civil control. Up to date, the dominance of the US-separation model is create quite different control mechanisms than a parliamentary democracy. A direct democratic and highly decentralized system, as we find it in Switzerland, may shape and integrate its forces in another way than other types of democracy. Therefore, there is reason to believe that new models such as for instance the concordance model stipulated by Renate Schiff⁵ are better suited for some political cultures. According to the latter, an effective civil control of the armed power is better guaranteed if a consensus between the civil and military elites as well as the citizenry is sought and developed as a form of political-military culture.

We can therefore conclude that:

- there is a need for comparative research in order to explain the existing variety of democratic control settings more thoroughly,

³ Cf. Carrel L., Pick O., Sarvas S. u.a., Demokratische und zivile Kontrolle von Sicherheitspolitik und Streitkräften, *Zürcher Beiträge zur Sicherheitspolitik und Konfliktforschung*, Heft Nr. 41, hg. von der Forschungsstelle für Sicherheitspolitik und Konfliktanalyse der ETH Zürich, Zürich 1977.

⁴ Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations*. Cambridge, Mass.: Belnap Press of Harvard University Press, 1957. See especially Peter D. Feaver, The Civil-Military Problematique: Huntington, Janowitz and the Question of Civilian Control, p.150, in: *Armed Forces & Society*, Vol. 23, No.2, Winter 1996, pp. 149-178.

⁵ Schiff R., Civil-Military Relations Reconsidered: A Theory of Concordance, in: *Armed Forces & Society*, Fall 1995, Vol. 22., No. 1, pp. 7-24.

- there is furthermore a need for clarifying theories and terminology such as "civilian control", "democratic control", "political control", "civil-military relations" etc.

3. Renaissance of the Control Issue in All European Countries Due to the Ongoing Decline of the Mass Armies

The end of the Cold War has drawn us nearer to the end of mass armies.⁶ Europe's armed forces are being reduced and restructured, military missions and priorities are being redefined. These transformations have a significant impact on civil-military relations. In seven European countries compulsory military service was abolished (Belgium, The Netherlands) or its abolition formally decided (France, Italy, Spain, Portugal). In other countries (Austria, Denmark, Germany, Hungary, Sweden) a public debate on compulsory military service is taking place. Citizens liable for service will rather become exceptions to the rule in the increasingly smaller and more professionally organized forces-in-being. The reduction of forces and the lowering of armament spending are a strain on civil-military relations. As a rule, the military resists the abolition of compulsory military service⁷ and the disarmament steps are often more motivated by financial than by security reasons. The abolition of conscription in Belgium, for instance, led to conflicts with chief-of-the-general-staff Charlier⁸. In the Netherlands as well, the abolition of compulsory military service took effect only due to the ever-increasing pressure of the government⁹.

The transfer to actual voluntary armed forces contains the danger of enhancing the development of right-wing subcultures and ghettos of values and lifestyles that are

⁶ Haltiner Karl W., The Definite End of the Mass Army in Western Europe?, in *Armed Forces & Society, Fall 1998, Vol. 25, No. 1*, pp. 7-36.

⁷ Haltiner, 1998, op.cit., p.31.

⁸ Manigart Philippe, Die belgischen Streitkräfte im Umbruch, in: Europas Streitkräfte im Umbruch, *Beilage zur Allg. Schw. Militärzeitschrift, ASMZ Nr. 11, 1993*, S. 15.

⁹ Rosendahl Huber Axel, Erste Erfahrungen mit der Berufsarmee in den Niederlanden, in: Haltiner Karl W. & Kühner Andreas, (Eds.), *Wehrpflicht und Miliz - Ende einer Epoche?*, Baden-Baden: Nomos, 1999, p. 57.

estranged from civil society.¹⁰ The military is inclined to become a social "counterculture".¹¹

By abolishing compulsory military service and reducing and professionalizing the armed forces, the latter are newly positioned in politics, economy and society as a whole. Thereby, the inherent normative tensions between the political and military elites¹² can become more severe. There are many indications of a growing alienation between the armed forces on one hand and the political authorities and society on the other hand in the United States¹³.

This means that democratic control is not solely a matter of concern to the new democracies of the post-communist East but something that the Western European democracies have to deal with as well.

4. "Who shall Guard the Guardians?" - The Case of the United Nations Peace Forces

During the 10 years which we call post-cold war period, the armed forces of the European democracies have been primarily used for interventions of a policing type, be it in classic peacekeeping and humanitarian operations or in more "muscular" peace restoring operations. The rules of engagement for this type of military mission differ essentially from the classic defence and combat tasks, for which the forces were originally created. They are to act with a minimum use of force in a "protective posture".¹⁴ The process of "constabularization" of armed forces has accelerated in the last decade, thereby creating new problems with regard to the political control of the military:

¹⁰ Boëne B., *Trends in the Political Control of Military Institutions in the Post-Cold War Era*, Paper presented at the ERGOMAS-Meeting in Sweden, September 1998, p.7.

¹¹ Vogt, R. Wolfgang (Hrsg.), *Militär als Gegenkultur*, Opladen: Leske + Budrich 1986.

¹² The same can be said for the United States: Snider D.M. Preface p. xiii in D.M. Snider., A. Carlton-Carew (eds.) *U.S. Civil-Military Relations in Crisis or Transition?* Washington D.C.: The Center for Strategic & International Studies, 1995.

¹³ Ricks T.E., *The Widening Gap Between the Military and Society*, *The Atlantic Monthly*, July 1997.

¹⁴ See the visionary concept of Morris Janowitz: *The Professional Soldier: A Social and Political Portrait*, New York: Free Press 1960 (3d ed. 1983: Sage) p. 76.

Peace forces act under the command of an international organization but are at the same time partly subordinated to their nation's control system (government, parliament, public opinion). The division of control power may create a dangerous ambiguity. Namely operational mandates and chains of command of supranational institutions are often insufficiently clear. For their in-theatre operations contingent commanders may not only receive orders from the UN-force commander but also have to ask the approval of their national superiors far away from the theatre. This creates dilemmas for the national contingent commands especially when the demands of the UN-force commander go beyond national restrictions. In order to avoid problems, frustrated national contingent commanders may be tempted not to act at all.¹⁵ Both the double command chain as well as growing passiveness can endanger the mission. Immediate interventions of national governments into operational actions can jeopardize operational control. The Dutch government intervened during the Srebrenica crisis in July 1995 when it became obvious that air-strikes could harm the besieged Dutch battalion in the enclave. On the other hand, military commanders on-the-spot will sometimes interpret their mandate in their own fashion and ascribe to themselves unauthorized autonomy. This can endanger the mission as well. Spectacular examples are the diplomatic scandal about French UNPROFOR general Jean Cot and the argument between the UN headquarters and the Italian government in the case of general Loi in 1993 in Somalia as well as the one between NATO commander-in-chief Wesley Clark and KFOR commander Michael Jackson about how to deal with the surprising Russian move into Kosovo in 1999.

No doubt: The problem of political control of forces under UN-command will have to be solved if the constabulary operations under the command of the United Nations are going to have a future.

¹⁵ See the Swedish report in Bell B., *Warriors in Peacekeeping - Points of tension in complex cultural encounters: Case studies of nations that participated in the NATO-led Implementation Force (IFOR) in Bosnia*, Paper presented at the Inter-University Seminar in Baltimore, 22 -24 October, 1999.



Established in 2000 on the initiative of the Swiss government, the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF), encourages and supports States and non-State governed institutions in their efforts to strengthen democratic and civilian control of armed and security forces, and promotes international cooperation within this field, initially targeting the Euro-Atlantic regions.

The Centre collects information, undertakes research and engages in networking activities in order to identify problems, to establish lessons learned and to propose the best practices in the field of democratic control of armed forces and civil-military relations. The Centre provides its expertise and support to all interested parties, in particular governments, parliaments, military authorities, international organisations, non-governmental organisations, academic circles.

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